

VZCZCXRO0452

PP RUEHCHI RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM
DE RUEHJA #1084/01 1560015

ZNR UUUUU ZZH

P 040015Z JUN 08

FM AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9185

INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS

RUEHHE/AMEMBASSY HELSINKI 0925

RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 2596

RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE 3404

RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 2085

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

RHHMUNA/USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 001084

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

AIDAC

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/MTS, DS/IP/EAP, DS/DSS, INR/EAP and INL
DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS AID
USAID FOR ANE/EAA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [SOCI](#) [ID](#)

SUBJECT: Villagers Blockade USAID Contractor Office in Aceh

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Villagers barricaded the complex of USAID-funded engineering subcontractor Parsons near the town of Lamno in Aceh on the night of June 2. Signs on the barricades warned people against attempting to enter or exit the compound. Two Americans and numerous Indonesian staff were inside at the time. While insisting that Parsons' personnel were never in any danger, the village chief justified the action on the grounds that not enough villagers were employed by the project. The situation was defused after community representatives held a dialogue with the police, Parsons, the military, and others. Aceh Governor Irwandi Yusuf and Regional Military Commander Supiadin AS acknowledged that events such as these are all too common in Aceh and expressed embarrassment over the incident. Aceh Police Chief Rismawan promised an investigation. End Summary.

Event Chronology

¶2. (SBU) The Parsons Corporation is a USG contractor on the USAID-funded road project in western Aceh. The guest house and office complex in a village on the edge of the small town of Lamno on the road from Banda Aceh to the western coastal town of Calang normally houses 14 local staff, and on the night of June 2 three expatriate Parsons employees including two Americans were staying at the guesthouse on the complex. Sometime around 11:00PM on June 2 local a group of approximately 70 villagers blocked the access roads to the Parsons property with barricades and signs warning people against attempting to enter or exit.

¶3. (SBU) Parsons' personnel immediately contacted the police and local officials after noticing the barricades. The authorities arranged for a meeting of all parties to discuss the community's grievances on June 3. At the meeting, villagers demanded greater employment on the Aceh road project. Because the letters the village had written on the subject had gone unanswered, villagers said, they had no choice but take stronger action to ensure that they were taken seriously. Several hours later, once Parsons agreed to facilitate contact with local subcontractor Hutama Karya, the villagers agreed to remove the barricades. Police informed the villagers that their actions were illegal and warned them of more direct consequences should they attempt to block access to the Parsons compound in the future.

Reaction

¶4. (SBU) Regional GAM commander Alex Abi told Consulate Medan that the organization had nothing to do with the barricading of ParsonsQ compound, although he was aware of villagers plans to do so. Had he known, he added, that there were foreigners in the compound he would have tried to discourage the village from this course of action. According to Alex, some sort of conflict was almost inevitable because the village had grown extremely frustrated with the local contractor. The spark, he said, was a recent incident where villagers requested the use of Parsons vehicles to transport the local soccer team to a match. Parsons turned down the request based upon USAID regulations that preclude use of USG-financed vehicles for such a purpose.

¶5. (SBU) Local officials have played down the activity and tried to justify the actions of the villagers. In a conversation with Medan Consulate staff on June 3 the Village Chief was unrepentant. Companies and NGOs operating in the area, he said, had an obligation to hire local workers.

¶6. (SBU) Both the military and police are monitoring the situation closely. Military, police, GAM, and local government sources contacted by Consulate Medan all agree that there was never any physical danger to Parsons staff. Local police have, however, asked Parsons to register their foreign staff with police if they plan an extended stay in the area and have warned villagers of the illegality of their actions.

¶7. (SBU) Aceh Governor Irwandi Yusuf expressed embarrassment at the incident when contacted by Consulate Medan. He added

JAKARTA 00001084 002 OF 002

that this type of action by villagers affecting outside organizations is occurring all too frequently in Aceh and is difficult to stop. (NOTE: The June 3 action, however, is the first event in Aceh directly impacting American citizens. END NOTE.) Irwandi promised to ask for aggressive follow-up from Aceh Police Chief Rismawan. He also expressed surprise the Village Chief may have been part of the action and promised to reprimand him and require a formal letter of apology. Aceh Police Chief Rismawan told Consulate Medan on June 3 that while the situation was resolved peacefully, he will instruct the District Police Chief to assess if there was any illegal intimidation or other improper behavior and to treat it accordingly. Regional military commander Major General Supiadin told Consulate Medan that he conducting his own investigation, stressed the importance of getting the USAID-funded road built, and added that the incident represented another embarrassment for Aceh and Indonesia.

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